

49.6

R E M A R K S
O N T H E
T W O L A S T C H A P T E R S
O F
M R . G I B B O N ' s H I S T O R Y ,
O F T H E
D E C L I N E A N D F A L L
O F T H E
R O M A N E M P I R E ,
I N A
L E T T E R T O A F R I E N D .

Cumque talis prodisset, ut præstigiis quibusdam admirandis facile posset imponere lectori vel imperito, vel simplici, vel parum attento, non fuit consilium prorsus obticescere; præsertim cum sint, quibus nihil non ardeat, quod diversam factionem adjuvet.

ERASMI Op. V. ix. p. 123. Ed. Clerici,

L O N D O N ;

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M D C C L X X V I .

10

R E M A R K S

ON THE

TWO LAST CHAPTERS

OF

MR. GIBBON'S HISTORY

OF THE

DECLINE AND FALL



LETTER TO A FRIEND

THE LIBRARY OF THE
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MR. GIBBON'S HISTORY
OF THE
DECLINE AND FALL
OF THE
ROMAN EMPIRE
IN 1789

L O N D O N

Printed by T. Cadell, at the
Museum, in Pall Mall.
1789.

DEAR SIR,

YOU have been pleased to desire my thoughts on a late distinguished publication. I have considered the work, with some degree of attention, and especially that part of it, to which your questions principally relate. Such remarks as have occurred to me, are wholly at your service.

Every true friend to christianity, cannot but feel himself interested in the concluding chapters of Mr. Gibbon's History. It is much to be lamented, that "the melancholy duty imposed upon the historian,"^{*} should have appeared to him, so sacred, and indispensable. The validity of this plea may well be contested, should it be found, that one unhappy bias prevails throughout the whole

B

course

^{*} Ch. 15. p. 456. The first edition is all along referred to.

course of his reseatches; that the Apologists of Christianity, are vilified on every occasion; the objections of its adversaries industriously brought forward, and the testimonies in favour of our religion, sometimes wholly concealed, at other times misrepresented.

The passages which I allude to, from the nature of the work itself, affect only, for the most part, the history of the first ages of christianity. But there are also, far too many oblique and ungenerous insinuations, which fail not to suggest their own proper inferences, and which affect materially, the general credit of christianity.

The enemy himself in the mean time, often lies hid behind the shield of some bolder warrior; and shoots his envenomed darts, under the protection of some avowed heretic, of the age.—It may be added, that the singular address of the historian, has served even to make the laboured arguments of modern writers, coincide with the description of a remote period of antiquity; and has introduced many well-known objections to christianity, which the refined scepticism of the
pre-

present age, claims for its own. I shall endeavour to oppose his oblique censures, by open argument; and shall enquire into the real weight of the objections, which he has thought fit to set before us, with the strictest candour.

It should be remarked carefully, that it is not the author's design, to account for the propagation of christianity from its earliest date, but during a particular period only.

The first, and most remarkable period of the history of its miraculous propagation, will not certainly, be found, to be concerned in his disquisitions, since it is not comprehended in his design. He will be found on examination, to have considered only, that later period, which commences after the times of the apostles, and which exhibits to us not the first

* We are obliged to attribute to the present age, the invention of many metaphysical subtleties, and perhaps of some arguments of another kind; but for the most part, even the licentiousness of modern infidelity, has been only able to revive old arguments, disguised under some new form. This is a truth, which must strike every one, versed in the history of infidelity, with the strongest conviction.

first planting, but the successive increase of christianity, after it had already taken root, and covered a very extensive tract of country.

If at any time he ascends higher, he deviates, strictly speaking, from his proper subject.

Our author has not indeed made any formal declaration, from what period he means to enquire into the progress of the establishment of christianity, because, probably it did not seem necessary. It must naturally be concluded, that he cannot have meant to enter into any earlier disquisition on the subject, than falls within the immediate compass of his history.

Respecting his general plan, he acquaints us, that it is his design, in his three first and introductory chapters, “to describe the prosperous condition of the empire, and afterwards from the death of Marcus Antoninus to deduce the most important circumstances of its decline and fall.”¹ But the death of Marcus Antoninus, happened towards the close of the second century; and we must conclude therefore, even in justice to the historian,

¹ Ch. 1.

torian, that his enquiry, as to its express and immediate design, cannot be meant to be carried any higher; and is not consequently, at all concerned about the propagation of Christianity, in the age of the Apostles.

But this age, contains the most striking period, of the history, of the propagation, of our religion.—A period, nevertheless so short, that taking its date, before the middle of the first century, it does not extend even to the close of it.

The last apostolic journey of St. Paul, ended in the year sixty eight. In the course of little more than thirty years after the death of Christ, his doctrine was spread, through a great part of the known world.

It was spread from the Euphrates to the Tiber, even in the most populous cities; and the foolishness of preaching overcame the wisdom of famous orators, and philosophers, as the steady piety of its votaries, overcame also the formidable opposition, of its most zealous enemies.

And the evidence of this period, it appears then we are still left in full possession of.

A period

A period of such peculiar importance in the annals of christianity, that the judicious advocate of our faith, will ever, principally insist on it. He will however insist also, tho' in a less degree, on the succeeding singular growth of christianity, amidst the most cruel persecutions, and in spite of the most terrifying opposition. He will not decline, to give an answer, to many even of the most favourite objections, that are sometimes urged, as to the character and conduct of the first Christians; nor refuse to meet the enemy of his faith, though he has artfully made a diversion, into a country, which he is less properly called on, to defend.

With regard however to the character of the first Christians, the matter may perhaps, fairly be stated thus.

It is a debt, that we owe certainly to their memories, that we owe to christianity in general, to keep them untainted, as far as may be, by the breath of slander; and we need not fear on the whole to affirm, that their lives did honour to their profession. But if on the other hand, the sentiments of
 individuals

individuals should sometimes be found uncharitable and unbecoming; if even their lives should have been disgraceful to their faith, we are in no sort, concerned to defend their cause, as the cause of christianity itself. We may lament that so pure a religion should so soon have contracted a mixture of corruption, even during her first residence on earth, but we may find comfort in the reflexion, that every material evidence, by which it is supported, still remains in full force; and that the authentic records of her doctrines, may still teach us what fruits they ought to have brought forth in others, and should yet produce in us.

I shall now beg leave to turn your attention, to some of our author's disquisitions, as they present themselves in order. It is by no means my design to follow him through all his researches. My remarks will be confined rather to particular passages; and it will be more especially my object, to examine diligently into the force of the several testimonies collected, in support of his assertions; since should these be found to fail, the superstructure

perstructure built upon them, must fall in consequence. I shall attend particularly also, to such short but significant reflections, not immediately relating to the subject of his history, as our author has occasionally indulged himself in, in the course of his general notes. From these, perhaps the true temper and design of our historian may best be collected, since in attending to them, we follow him as it were, into his most secret recesses, and hear him speaking in his own person. For all such reflexions too, he is more immediately accountable, should it be found, that the history itself can by no means be said to have required them.

Much stress is laid by our author, on his first supposed cause of the rapid growth of the christian church. Yet how "an inflexible, and intolerant zeal," such as condemned even the most harmless ceremonies of paganism, could invite Pagans, amidst all their prejudices, to embrace christianity, does not seem altogether

ther easy to explain. It might indeed produce the only effect; our author, in the recapitulation of his argument, "has assigned to it; it might supply Christians with that invincible valour, which should keep them firm to their received principles, but it could hardly be of service in converting Pagans. Is not then this secondary cause, inadequate to its declared effect?"

To the next cause alleged, we may certainly attribute more force; and the friends of christianity, will very readily acknowledge the doctrine of a future life, brought to light by the gospel, to have had its share in spreading the belief of it. But with what propriety can this be considered, as an human cause? Is not this distinguished excellence of the Christian revelation, to be considered rather as a part of "the convincing evidence of the doctrine itself,"* and as belonging to the very essence of the gospel? If so, it is altogether improperly enumerated,

C

among

* P. 502.

* P. 456.

among "the secondary causes which assisted the truth of the Christian religion."¹

The miraculous powers ascribed to the primitive church, are assigned as a third cause. We may here also readily join issue with our author. But we may at the same time remind him, that he gains no step towards accounting for the growth of Christianity, from "human causes,"² while he sets before us, the supposed extraordinary interposition, of the hand of God.

Thus much, of his general delineation of the causes of the growth of the Christian church. Let us proceed now to consider such disquisitions, as present themselves in his particular display of them.

Among the first objects of his researches, the sects of the Ebionites and Gnostics, hold a distinguished place.

It will not be matter of much wonder to any one, who considers the authoritative and express decision, of the great Apostle of the Gentiles—who considers the general tenor and spirit of the gospel—that in process of
time

¹ P. 502.

² P. 479:

time at least, those who like the Ebionites, contended for the retaining the ceremonies of the Mosaic law, as a part of the system of Christianity, should be openly condemned and rejected, by every true Christian.

If an intemperate degree of zeal, exerted in a good cause, unhappily transported many into a culpable extreme, and led them not only to "exclude their judaizing brethren" from the hope of salvation," but to decline also, "any intercourse with them, in the common offices of social life," we have certainly to lament, the error of those who knew not what spirit they were of.

But on the other hand, to have treated those, who, while they professed themselves Christians in principle, were Jews in practice, as real and perfect Christians, would have been to forego the plain and decisive precepts of the gospel, which, when that which was perfect was now come, enjoined, that, that which was imperfect, should be done away.

The

The history of the Gnostics, were it fully displayed, would afford room for several important observations. It might be shown, that their knowledge was not indeed according to truth, was rather in many instances in direct opposition to it, and that their objections seem to have flowed principally, from that fruitful source of error, even in later times, a vain affectation of science, falsely so called. Let us for the present, content ourselves, with collecting such scattered features of their true portraiture, as even our author himself, who must be allowed certainly to have done full justice to their objections, may supply us with.

I cannot however but make mention of the profane derision of the Gnostics, in one instance. There is something so extremely daring and horrible, in giving the soft epithet of "venial,"^{*} to an offence committed in defiance of the express command of God, delivered by himself;—there is such a flagrant want of truth, in asserting "eternal
"condemnation

^{*} P. 460.

“ condemnation to have been pronounced,
 “ against human kind” ¹ for this offence of
 their first progenitors, when every circum-
 stance of God’s sentence, relates to this life
 only; when no mention whatsoever, is made,
 of human kind in general, ² that we may
 well wonder, to find such objections, repeat-
 ed, by the too-faithful historian.

For the rest, let us avail ourselves of his
 own acknowledgments, that the objections of
 the Gnostics, were “ petulantly urged, thro’
 “ vain science, ³ that they delivered them-
 “ selves to the guidance of a disordered ima-
 “ gination; that they degraded the honour
 “ of religion, ⁴ and impiously represented
 “ the God of Israel” ⁵ under a character,
 which cannot indeed belong to him.

We may well apply on this occasion, a
 very judicious remark, which we borrow
 from our author himself. “ The ene-
 “ mies of a religion, never understand it,
 “ because they hate it; and they often hate
 “ it, because they do not understand it.
 “ They

¹ P. 469.

² See Genesis, ch. 3. v. 16-20.

³ P. 461.

⁴ P. 462.

⁵ P. 460.

“ They adopt the most atrocious calumnies
“ against it.”¹

If notwithstanding all this, the Gnostics
“ contributed to assist, rather than retard,
“ the progress of Christianity,”² they seem
at least to have formed their converts, very
imperfectly, while “ they required not any
“ belief of that antecedent revelation,”³
which duly understood, forms an indispen-
sable part of the genuine system of Christia-
nity.

An extreme abhorrence of idolatry, is de-
scribed to us, as a striking feature, of the
character

¹ “ Les ennemis d’une religion ne la connoissent jamais,
“ parceq’ils la haïssent, et souvent ils la haïssent, parceq’ils
“ ne la connoissent pas. Ils adoptent contre elle les calom-
“ nies les plus atroces.” GIBBON, *Essai sur l’etude de la*
litterature. Lond. 1761. p. 111.

I am happy to seize an opportunity of acknowledging, that,
that attention to the Belles Lettres, which is displayed in the
course of this work, forms its least merit. It is preceded by
an English dedication, which does the utmost honour to the
author’s heart. A dedication from A SON, distinguishing
himself in literature, at an early period of life, addressed in
the warmest terms of affection, to A RESPECTED FATHER.
I had *almost* said, LET THIS EXPIATE!

² P. 462.

³ Ibid.

character of the first Christians. This will not surely be condemned by those, who are themselves turned from vain idols, to the living God.

It is indeed impossible to worship God and Jupiter; and if the zeal of Christians sometimes carried them to a scrupulous abhorrence of the very appearance of idolatry, even in its most harmless forms, it may be remembered, that they were expressly enjoined to abstain from all appearance of evil.

What wonder then, if those, who were peculiarly called upon, not to serve vain idols, fled even from "the most sacred festivals of the Roman ritual, if they abhorred even the humane licence of the Saturnalia, and refused to hail the genial powers of fecundity;"¹ when these festivals were destined to indulge the pious remembrance of the dead, with idolatrous ceremonies, when, to partake of them, implied necessarily, a belief of the system of Polytheism!

What

¹ P. 465.

What wonder, if devoted as they were, to worship the deity, in spirit and in truth, they remained unmoved by the splendor and pomp of external ceremonies, if even "the elegant forms, and agreeable fictions of the Greeks," and the beautiful mythology¹ of the poets, made no impression on those who were not engaged in the search of what was alluring to the eye, or pleasing to the imagination, but dedicated only, to the solemn study of pure religion!

In the course of a display, of the doctrines of a future state among the Pagans of Greece and Rome, we find it acknowledged that even "the most sublime efforts of philosophy" cannot ascertain its existence.² We are obliged to our author, for confirming anew, the important arguments of others, in favour of the necessity of that revelation, which in the general course of his disquisitions, he seems insensible of the value of. I shall not detain you

¹ P. 465. Our author's description of Paganism, in his former work, already quoted, is somewhat more accurate. *Ce systeme riant, mais absurde.* p. 109.

² P. 468.

you long on this head. It seems only necessary to offer a few remarks in vindication of the canonical authority of the Apocalypse.

“ In the council of Laodicea, we are told, the Apocalypse was tacitly excluded from the sacred canon, by the same churches of Asia, to which it was addressed.”^{*} No new objection this! But since it has been thought proper, to bring it forward again into view, why is it not introduced, with a more exact state of the case? From this, it must for ever appear, at the very worst, that the point in question, is strictly problematical, and that in the course of the debate, at least, neither side, can claim a decisive victory. If it cannot be shewn absolutely, that the Apocalypse was tacitly approved by the council, so neither can it be shewn, that it was tacitly excluded.

The true state of the case, is briefly this. It should be remarked, that it seems plainly to have been the immediate object of the council, not, to establish a complete canon

D

of

^{*} Note 65. p. lxix.

of the scriptures, but to ascertain only, what books, among those that were deemed canonical, should be publickly read, in the churches. They decree first, that no books which were composed only by private persons, should be read, nor any other that were not canonical; but only those, which belonged to the canon of the Old and New Testament.¹ They then proceed to determine,² which of these should be read, and in their list of the books of the New Testament, the Apocalypse is not found included.

No direct reason, is given then for the omitting to make mention of the Apocalypse. It is not proscribed, but it is not enjoined to be read.³ It has been conjectured, therefore, not without seeming probability, that this was occasioned only, by its being thought,

¹ Can. 59. Conc. Laod. Beveregii Synodicon, Ox. 1672. Tom. 1. p. 480.

² Can. 60. *ibid.* 481.

³ See Twells's critical examen of the new text and version of the New Testament, p. 3. where this point is fully considered.

thought, too mysterious to be rightly understood by common hearers.

But of such importance does this problematical objection appear to our author, that he is able to assign no other cause, for the Apocalypse's having been received by the Protestant churches, than, "the advantage of turning its mysterious prophecies against the see of Rome."

We cannot indeed adopt the cause he has assigned, but we will supply him, not with one reason in the place of it, but with many and abundant reasons.

In less than threescore years after the council of Laodicea, the Synod of Carthage, reckons the Apocalypse by name, among the canonical books of the New Testament.² And in the seventh century, the sixth general council, fully established the authority of this Synod, and confirmed its decrees.³

The testimonies of the Fathers in favour of the authenticity of this book are numerous.

We

¹ See Bp. Cosin's scholastical history, of the canon of scripture, ch. vi. lxii.

² Conc. Carthag. can. 47. tom. 2. Conc. Labbe.

Bev. Synod. Can. 2. tom. 1. p. 158.

We may allege, those of Justin Martyr, Irenæus, Clemens, Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian, and Lactantius; to omit mentioning several others.* We need not therefore seemingly be at a loss, as our author is, to account for the reception of the Apocalypse, even in the Greek churches, when we find so many of the Greek, as well as the Latin Fathers, bearing testimony to it. Much less need we assign, an unworthy, and interested reason for its reception in the protestant churches.

Indeed the very eminent writer, whom our author has chosen to refer to, (not surely for a confirmation of the whole of his remark) might have suggested to his thoughts, the reasons that have led the several churches, to receive the Apocalypse, as canonical. On consulting his elegant discourses, we shall find

* I. Martyr. dial. xx. 4 or 6. Irenæus, l. 4. c. 37. Origen Comment in Joann. xiv. 6, 7. Cyprian de bon. pudicit. xxii. 9. Laet. Ep. c. xlii. Tertull. adv. Marc. l. 3. c. xiv.

The several passages of the Fathers, that bear testimony to the scriptures, may be seen under one view, in a very useful work, by the Rev. Mr. Atkinson, entitled, a Table of the Evidence of the Sacred Canon.

find the use of the apocalyptic prophecies, against the church of Rome, touched on, by the hand of a master ; ¹ but we shall find the same able interpreter of these prophecies, agreeing with those who consider this book, as more strongly attested, than even any other book, of the New Testament. ²

One word, concerning, “ the condemnation of the wisest and most virtuous of the pagans,” stated by our author, as the unanimous doctrine of the primitive church. ³ It may not be improper to remark, that “ the vehement Tertullian,” is here, the only evidence appealed to. Nor is it on this occasion only, but on many others also, ⁴ that he is brought forward to view, as if we were to consider him, as our author’s favourite

¹ Bp. Hurd’s Sermon xii. vol. 2. p. 208.

² Sermon x. p. 111. (note) vol. 2. 2d. edit. 12mo. 1773. The observation introduced there, ought not to be passed over. — “ If the authority of this momentous book be indeed “ questionable, the church of Rome could hardly have failed “ long since to make the discovery, or to triumph in it.”

³ P. 473.

⁴ See notes 39. 41. 45. 47. 49. 83, &c. and p. 484.

vourite witness. It must be confessed, that the writings of this "zealous African," however they may on many accounts deserve our respect, sometimes also, breathe a spirit, altogether contrary to the plain dictates of Christian charity, and still oftener exhibit instances of a mistaken piety, that is rather enthusiastic, than rational. How far it became our author to select diligently, the blemishes that stain the writings of this intemperate advocate of Christianity; how far even "the melancholy duty imposed on the "historian," on this, as well as other occasions, may serve to plead his apology, we have ventured to assert, is at least uncertain.

There may be those among the fathers of the church, who have openly asserted the crime of "obstinately persisting," in the worship of false deities, when they had it in their power to know the true God. St. Paul had declared men inexcusable, for their idolatry, even under a reference to the light of nature only.¹ But to warn men of their sins, and to pronounce their

¹ Rom. i. 20, 21.

their absolute condemnation, in consequence of those sins, are distinct things. It might well be said, that those obstinate idolaters, who wilfully shut their eyes against the light of nature and revelation, did not "*deserve*" "*pardon*" of the deity. If our author means to assert, that the fathers taught that neither could such pardon "*be expected*" by any means, this requires further proof; and cannot be granted on the sole evidence of the inhuman and uncharitable declamation, of "*the stern Tertullian.*"

But it is not the faith of the primitive church alone, that undergoes the severity of our author's censure. The same offensive doctrine, he asserts, is still "*the public doctrine of all the christian churches.*" But he asserts it wholly without proof. I cannot but presume to enter a protest against our author's judgment, at least in the name of one church, the church of England; and am bold to affirm, that her mild decisions, are not stained with so foul a blot, as, "*the condemnation of the wisest and most virtuous Pagans.*"

In

* Note 68. p. lxx.

In the mean time let him blush at the remembrance, of having included that church of which he is himself a member, in so severe a censure, without even attempting to bring proof of the truth of his assertion.

I should be but ill inclined to take any notice of our author's disquisitions concerning the miraculous powers of the primitive church, had not some reflections fallen from him (not perhaps necessarily suggested by his immediate subject) which affect materially, the faith of modern Christians. "That very free and ingenious inquiry," which, in his own words, "appears to have excited a general scandal among the divines of our own, as well as of the other churches of Europe," met with many learned antagonists. To enter again into so recent a controversy, to repeat answers, so easy to be consulted, would be altogether superfluous.

But the description that he gives us of the faith of modern times, is indeed melancholy and alarming. "A latent, and even involuntary scepticism adheres to the most pious dispositions. Their admission of supernatural

“supernatural truths, is much less an active
 “consent, than a cold and passive acquies-
 “cence. Accustomed long since to observe
 “and to respect the invariable order of na-
 “ture, our reason, or at least our imagina-
 “tion is not sufficiently prepared to sustain
 “the visible action of the deity.”

I would willingly hope, that there can be but little reason to think that such scepticism adheres to, “the most pious dispositions,” or that they admit “the supernatural truths of the gospel but with a cold and passive acquiescence.” An active inquiry into the authenticity of Revelation, (and such surely we must expect from pious dispositions) will not fail to produce an active, ready, and willing consent. Later histories do indeed set before us, “the invariable order of nature” rather than “the visible action of the deity” employed, in changing its course, for the purpose of sealing his authentic instructions, in the sight of his creatures. But this affords no argument against our believing fully, the wonders of former ages,

E when

when sufficiently attested to us. In such case the space of time, which has passed since, may well be said, to be, in a manner, annihilated. Thro' the medium of authentic history, we are set in the place, as it were, of actual spectators of the events, and no "respect" can be due, "to the invariable order of nature" that is not far exceeded by the respect due to "the authentic wonders of the evangelic history,"¹ when the end plainly seems worthy of the interposition of God. A rational faith thus acquired, will indeed become naturally, "a deep impression," and may be justly celebrated, as the Christian's truest boast.

But the objection we have been considering, is in reality no other than the well known argument of Mr. Hume, clothed in a new form, for the present occasion. It has been so often and so fully answered, that it is needless to take further notice of it.²

We

¹ P. 479.

² See Dr. Adam's Essay on miracles,—Dr. Campbell's inquiry, &c. and the late Dr. Powell's sermons.

We shall readily acknowledge, that the doctors of the church of England, are to be reckoned among those, "more rigid," but orthodox teachers, who consider "the moral virtues as destitute of any value, or efficacy, in the work of our justification."

We will only add, that these rigid doctors, tho' they exclude the moral virtues from the office of justifying, teach at the same time, the absolute necessity of practising them.

The well-known reproach of Celsus, "when it is cleared from misrepresentation, contributes, says our author, to the honour of the church." We readily acquiesce in the observation.

But we may not perhaps be willing to acknowledge, that, the influx of "the most abandoned of sinners,"¹ contributed so much to the increase of the church, as he seems to imagine.

That many abandoned sinners were converted in the first ages of Christianity, may readily be granted; but that the number of those

¹ P. 480.

those who needed no repentance was greater, may likewise be asserted.

The testimony of Origen, who in the opinion even of our author, "was intimately acquainted with the history of the Christians" is express.

"If

¹ Ch. 16. p. 546. However Origen may sometimes meet with respect from our author, he stands elsewhere accused of the most disingenuous conduct in *mutilating* the objection of his adversary Celsus (see note 101. p. lxxi.) I am not able to discover the least traces of mutilation; but had there even been room for suspicion, I should have thought candour had obliged me to be very cautious in exhibiting the accusation, in an instance in which there is no opportunity of comparing the passage, with the original.—I should have been the more cautious because the method which Origen has pursued, bespeaks the utmost fairness in his proceedings. He does not interweave the objections of his adversary, as he might have done, into the body of his text, but states them separately, to all appearance at least, in his own words. But to pass by all this. I am sorry to be obliged to add, that the charge of *mutilation*, in this case, lies at our author's door. Origen expressly denies the accusation of Celsus, and does not attempt to answer his objection, because, as he asserts, it proceeds wholly on a false supposition.—Εἶτα παλιν, ὡς εἶρος τῷ Κέλσῳ, φέρει ἐν τοῖς ἐξῆς, λέγων ἅ ὁμοῖς ἡμῶν ἀνεγράψει, καὶ φησὶ τοιαῦτα: and then, (having quoted the objection) πρὸς τοῦτων οὐχ ἔστι λόγος, ὅτι γὰρ λέγει τις ἡμῶν.

After

“ If any one, says he, will candidly con-
 “ sider us Christians, we can produce him
 “ more who have been converted from a
 “ life not the worst, than from a very wick-
 “ ed course. For they whose conscience
 “ speaks favourably in their behalf, are dis-
 “ posed to wish, that our doctrine concern-
 “ ing the future rewards of the good, may
 “ be true; and so are more ready to assent
 “ to the gospel, than profligate men.”

Nor do we think indeed, that “ the sud-
 “ den emotions of shame, of grief, and of
 “ terror,” can be looked upon as necessary,
 towards a rational conversion; nor is the
 general question concerned about “ wonder-
 “ ful conversions,” when we treat of the
 many thousands that were converted in the
 first ages of Christianity.

That Christ also, as well as his Apostles,
 did indeed often address themselves to “ those
 “ who

After this, we at least cannot agree with our author, that
 Celsus has urged his objection, *with great candour*; and we
 may ask, how it can be supposed, that Origen, even had he
 been shewn to be capable of it; would *mutilate* an objection,
 which he meant to expose, as founded on a *false* assertion!

• Origen contra Cels. Lib. 3.

“who were oppressed by the consciousness
 “of their vices,” is indisputably true.
 But we do not find however, that such alone
 were converted, tho’ the saving truths of the
 gospel were often more immediately urged to
 them, because they stood most in need, of
 having them peculiarly enforced. Our divine
 master, may best apologize for his own con-
 duct, in a manner worthy of himself. “They
 “that are whole, need not a physician, but
 “they that are sick.”

That some of the first Christians were
 averse to the business of war and government,
 cannot be disputed.

But we must not admit this as a general
 description of their conduct, or as the com-
 mon practice, or determination of the church.

Many, it is certain, bore arms, and dis-
 charged public offices. A variety of testi-
 monies might be produced, to shew that
 they were at least in all respects, as useful to
 society, as their consciences would permit.
 That they contributed in many respects, to
 promote the business of civil society, even our
 author

author may assure us, when he remarks that the converts of the new religion "were permitted to increase their separate property, by all the lawful means of trade and industry."

It should be remarked too, that these offices and employments which some declined, were usually clogged with such circumstances and conditions, as in their opinions interfered wholly with the precepts of Christianity. The reason of their conduct will therefore, in such cases, be as evident, as it is honourable.

Our author's attempt to account for the growth of Christianity, from secondary causes, does not end with the display of those five principal causes, which he has chosen to insist on. One circumstance is yet behind, which as we find it stated, is to be looked upon as almost alone sufficient, to explain its rapid and extended propagation.

But should we be inclined, to attribute some part of the success of Christianity, to the sceptical state, of the minds of Pagans, it surely cannot be thought, to have had any great

great share, in the work. If the minds of many were already estranged from their own numberless deities, can it be conceived yet, that they would be altogether willing to embrace a new religion, in which they could discern *no deity* at all, for the object of their worship? That the first Christians, were for this very reason, in general considered as Atheists, our author, has afforded us sufficient proof. If the generality, had conceived an aversion for the absurd customs of their own external rites, would they yet, readily become converts to a form of worship, simple and unadorned, without temples, and without images, and undoubtedly very ill calculated, to attract the servile veneration of the people? If, as it should seem, our author's character of Christianity, considered as "a revelation, adorned with all, that could attract the curiosity, the wonder, and the veneration of the people,"² must be understood

¹ This is well known, for some time, to have been literally the case; and when afterwards churches were erected, they were wholly destitute of the splendor of heathen temples.

² P. 505.

derstood to relate to its form of worship, and its external ceremonies, I cannot but wholly differ from him in opinion, as the contrary, I think may be undeniably proved. The New Testament itself is an unanswerable proof of it, the only authority, by which such a testimony can be decided, and the only one to which a protestant at least can appeal, to determine the question.

Nor have we as yet descended in the course of our author's history, into those times, in which the spirit of Christianity became corrupted, and the pure religion of Jesus, unhappily received into its bosom, the treacherous pageantry of paganism. The natural simplicity of its worship, could not but be preserved, while it still continued at open war, even with the most harmless ceremonies of idolatry.

But why too, conclude, that the incredulity of the speculative philosopher, would so readily communicate itself to the multitude; that the people, incapable surely in general, of comprehending the refined scepticism of their superiors, would yet at once forsake

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those doctrines “to which they had yielded
 “the most implicit belief?”¹ If we may argue from present facts (and it is a position of our author’s, that the human heart is still the same)² it is fully seen, that the same deluding ceremonies, as have unhappily produced in our own times, the melancholy effect of precipitating, the higher ranks of men, into a total desertion of religion, still retain at the same time, their full hold, on the minds of the people. The multitude has not in any sort shaken off, the chains of bigotry, in consequence of the free, and avowed principles, of their superiors.

It is granted too that the higher ranks of the pagans, in practice, still “affected to
 “treat with respect and decency, the religious institutions of their country.”³ And it would require surely, more penetration, than usually falls to the lot, of the people, to discern “their secret contempt.”⁴

I can-

¹ P. 504.

² N. 112. p. lxii.

³ P. 504.

⁴ P. 504.

I cannot indeed but consider, the system of reasoning, which seeks to account for the growth of Christianity, from the scepticism of pagans, as materially affected by fact, by the repeated proceedings of the pagan multitude. "The impatient clamours of the multitude, dooming the Christians to the severest tortures, on the stated returns of the public games and festivals,"¹ but ill agree with the idea of an actual disposition to receive the religion of Christians, and to forsake the Gods, to whose memory, these games and festivals were dedicated. On the whole, surely our author must at least be said, to have drawn far too general an inference, when he ventures to assert, that those who are inclined to pursue such reflections, as a consideration of the scepticism of the pagan world, suggests, "instead of viewing with astonishment, the rapid progress of Christianity, will perhaps be surprised, that its success was not still more rapid and still more universal."²

That

¹ Ch. xvi. p. 543.

² Ch. xv. p. 505.

That the peace and union of the Roman empire facilitated the progress of Christianity, will readily be granted; and it has been ingeniously remarked, that this circumstance, may serve to point out, to those who are curious, to enquire into the reason of the late appearance of Christianity, the propriety of that fullness of time which was fixed on, by the providence of the Almighty, for the introduction of Revelation.

I shall not follow our author, through all his nicer calculations of the numbers of the first Christians. They must at least be allowed, to be in part conjectural, and the testimonies of Tacitus and Pliny, afford us positive and unsuspected evidence. Nor do I see, why that candid allowance,¹ should so humanely be extended to their "vague expressions" which is not in any sort granted to the "splendid exaggeration" of Justin Martyr.² Their testimonies certainly do not so much stand in need of it, and it cannot
be

¹ P. 509.

² P. 512.

be said, that "the measure of their belief
"was regulated by that of their wishes."¹

But, the language of Tacitus "is almost
"similar to the stile employed by Livy,
"when he relates the introduction and sup-
"pression of the rites of Bacchus."² Per-
haps the similitude, on an accurate compari-
son, will not be easily discovered. It is a
common indefinite mode of expression, to
speak of "a great multitude,"³ and it does
not seemingly stand in need of the aid of
conjecture, to justify it. The reason that
may be given for the stile of Livy, will not
at all apply to the narrative of Tacitus. In
the former case, the Roman government
was really alarmed, on account of the reput-
ed numbers of the Bacchanals, who might
well be expected to rise in arms. And the
historian accordingly relates the real appre-
hensions of the senate. In the latter case, in
however criminal a light, the unhappy vic-
tims of Nero's cruelty, might otherwise be
regarded, they had at least uniformly shewn
them-

¹ P. 512. ² P. 509.

³ *Ingens multitudo.* Tacit. 15. 44;

themselves obedient subjects, and they are expressly described, as selected only, as so many destined sacrifices, to suppress, if possible, the rumour that had prevailed against the emperor. Tacitus therefore could have no occasion for adopting a language, suited to express the fears of the Roman people.

Much less can this reasoning be applied to the testimony of Pliny. His letter shews, that he was alarmed only, by the number of those that would be in danger of *suffering*,¹ should a rigid persecution be enforced, not of those, who might endanger the peace of the Roman government, through a rebellious disposition. His conduct is evidently that of the prudent politician, desirous of saving the lives of his master's subjects, not of the affrighted magistrate, dreading an insurrection.²

But

¹ *Visa est enim mihi res digna consultatione, maxime propter periclitantium numerum.* Plin. Epist. xcvi. Lib. x.

² The candour of our author, celebrates the Roman governor, by the title of the *humane* Pliny. Yet this humane governor, dissatisfied with the testimony that even those, who had

But perhaps it will still be contended, that allowance must be made for an oratorical stile. It should be remarked here, that he acquaints Trajan, that "the temples which were almost forsaken, *begin* to be frequented, that the sacred solemnities, after a long intermission, *are revived*, and that the victims likewise are every where bought up, whereas for some time, there *were* few purchasers." So that could he be supposed to have been at all influenced by fear, it appears that at the actual time of his writing, the prospect of affairs was such, as might inspire him with fresh hopes. What appearances are there then, of exaggeration? But the very improbability of the supposition, duly considered, might otherwise serve to refute it.²

The

had *revolted* from the religion of the Christians, had given of the innocence of their worship, and the purity of their manners, judges it even the more necessary, to examine, *by torture*, two unhappy *women*. Surely he exhibits a bad specimen of his own *humanity*. See his letter already quoted.

¹ See the letter, as before.

² This argument is placed in a strong light, by a late able writer. "These are," says he, Pliny's expressions, and we must

The discussion of one point more, shall conclude my examination of this chapter.

The inattention of the sages of Greece and Rome, to the convincing evidence of miracles, is stated by our author, as matter of much surprise. And the omission of the darkness of the passion, in the works of two distinguished philosophers, is made the occasion of a problem, which those who maintain the certainty of the event, seem called upon to solve.

The former of these difficulties, will not, at least be found, wholly inexplicable. The miracles that were performed during the age of Christ, were performed at a distance from the residence of these sages, and while as yet, no other circumstances had contributed to
direct

must " either suppose, that the governor of a province, writing to an emperor about a difficulty which embarrassed his administration, and requesting his directions how he should proceed, uses the arts of oratory, and totally misleads him whom he will be obliged to follow, or we must confess, that the Christians, in that extensive and remote country, on the border of the Euxine sea, *far exceeded in number, the other inhabitants.*" Dr. Powell's sermons, disc. x. p. 161.

direct their attention to the obscure and despised sect of Christians. In the age of the apostles, Judea still continued the chief scene of their miracles; nor does the preaching of St. Paul, appear to have been accompanied by signs and wonders, either at Corinth, at Athens, or at Rome. It cannot therefore be affirmed strictly during these ages at least, that the evidence of miracles, was addressed to "their senses;"¹ they could only become acquainted with them, thro' the medium of the scriptures, or by common report; and how little attention, the sages of antiquity paid to all that concerned the history of Christianity, need not be insisted on.

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¹ P. 517.

² The scepticism of the Pagan world, in the opinion of a good judge, may be alleged rather, as a reason for their disbelief of Christianity, than as a circumstance favourable to its propagation. "Such were many of the heathen.—They thought, and they had reason to think, that the religion of their country was fable and forgery, which inclined them to suppose that other religions were no better, and deserved not to be examined." (JORTIN'S truth of the Christian religion. p. 57.) "The careless glance which men of wit and

In the time of the first disciples of the apostles, the miracles that are said to have been wrought, must be considered as falling more immediately under their inspection.— But it may well be conjectured, from the reigning fashion of the times, that the minds of these sages were still filled with such early prejudices, as would effectually prevent their lying open to conviction.—It is acknowledged to be doubtful at least, whether they condescended to peruse the apologies of the first Christians; and if a variety of circumstances combined to fix in them a rooted contempt for the very name of Christianity, and to withhold them from studying the pure morality of its doctrines, it may afford but little

“and learning condescended to cast on the Christian revelation,” is borne witness to by our author (ch. xvi. p. 125.) And Dr. Lardner conjectures that Epictetus’s silence with regard to the Christians, may be accounted for, from this consideration. (Collection of testimonies, vol. ii. p. 105.)

It was a common complaint of the first Christians, that they were persecuted on account of *the name* only. Pliny’s letter to Trajan, very remarkably confirms this; “*NOMEN IPSUM, ETIAMSI FLAGITIIS CAREAT, ad flagitia eo-
hærentia nomini puniantur.*”

little cause for wonder, that they either carelessly overlooked, or obstinately rejected, even its more sensible proofs.

The other difficulty proposed to us, is founded on this circumstance.

Both Seneca and Pliny, “ have recorded
“ all the great phenomena of nature, earth-
“ quakes, meteors, comets, and *eclipses*,
“ which their indefatigable curiosity could
“ collect.”¹ But they “ have omitted to
“ mention” that particular eclipse which is
related to have happened at the time of the
crucifixion.²

Of the three chapters referred to in Seneca, two of them treat only of comets and meteors, and one of earthquakes. But his disquisitions in this chapter, relate only to such earthquakes as had produced their usual and dreadful effects in destroying cities, and burying thousands. His attention therefore, cannot

¹ P. 518.

² A similar objection, drawn from the silence of heathen writers in general, is urged by *Mons'r. de Voltaire*, in his *Dictionnaire philosophique*. But he proceeds wholly on the idea, that the darkness was universal, a position that may well be contested, from the evidence of the evangelists, themselves.

cannot properly be supposed to have been directed, towards a far different kind of earthquake, which tho' it rent the rocks, and divided the vail of the temple in twain, does not appear to have occasioned any such damage as might entitle it to a place, among that class of earthquakes, which the philosopher, alone considers. Of *eclipses*, the more immediate subject of the present argument, *no one*, of these chapters treats; nor have I been fortunate enough, to discover, even elsewhere, in the course of Seneca's laborious work, any enumeration of eclipses, "collected by his indefatigable curiosity." But in Pliny, we are told "a distinct chapter, "is devoted to eclipses of an extraordinary "nature, and unusual duration," "who "contents himself nevertheless, with describing the singular defect of light, which "followed the murder of Cesar." As the best solution of the difficulty, I will repeat to you, this *important* chapter, "devoted" as it is, to eclipses of that kind, among which, it is contended, the preternatural darkness,

darkness, in question, ought to have found a place. It will not detain you long.

“ There are, says our philosopher, eclipses of an extraordinary nature, and unusual duration, such as that which followed the murder of Cesar, and in the war with Antony; when a perpetual paleness covered the sun, almost throughout the whole year.” You have the whole chapter laid before you.

You will now perhaps be surprized at the serious manner, in which this objection is proposed. It must appear surely from the whole of the chapter, that it was not the philosopher's design, to record all the most remarkable eclipses, that might be collected, but merely to confirm the general truth of his proposition, so far, as not to leave it wholly without proof. Why he should have fixed particularly on a traditional instance, relating to Cesar, will easily be conceived, when it is recollected, how flattering the mention of it might prove, and that “ this
“ season

† P. 158. Fiunt prodigiosi & longiores defectus; qualis occiso Cæsare, & Antoniano bello, totius fere anni pallore perpetuo. Plin. nat. hist. lib. II. c. 30. fol. edit. Paris. 1723.

“ season of obscurity, had already been celebrated by most of the poets, and historians of that memorable age”.

Had this latter objection, been really formidable, it yet might have been sufficient perhaps, to have remarked, that a mere silence, concerning any fact, in persons at least, but accidentally called on, to make mention of it, cannot properly be considered as of any weight, in opposition to the positive evidence of those, whose express business it is to record it.

And we might have insisted farther on that “ careless indifference,” which it is acknowledged, “ the most copious and the most minute of the Pagan writers have shewn to the affairs of the Christians.”²

But we have no need to recur to such solutions, when it appears, that of the two philosophers, appealed to, the one has not any where designedly recorded eclipses, and the other has only treated of them in such a manner, as to give us no reason to expect the mention of the darkness of the passion, in

¹ P. 518.

² P. 530.

in preference, to that of other instances, which the history of his own nation, supplied him with.

The remaining pages of our author's disquisitions, while they treat of the conduct of the Roman government towards the Christians, contain in reality a laboured apology for it, rather than a disinterested relation of mere facts.

The guilt of the princes and magistrates of Rome, is industriously palliated; the most stubborn proofs occasionally turned aside from their plain and natural signification, and the persecuted Christians considered in that light *only*, in which the most bigotted of their persecutors would have placed them. It is every where supposed, according to the spirit of the argument adopted, that the Christians were acknowledged criminals, and without doubt, merited the punishments inflicted on them. On this idea, the conduct of their persecutors is apologized for, and "the indulgent spirit of Rome, and of Polytheism" is extolled, either on account of
the

the nature of the punishments they inflicted, or of the occasional cessation of their cruelties.

Yet many of those emperors, who distinguished themselves in the persecution of Christianity, were tyrants of so odious a character, were themselves so lost to all ideas of religion, that even the pretence of their having persecuted the Christians in defence of the religion of their country, can scarcely be urged in their favour. The inoffensive principles of the Christians, considered as subjects, soon became sufficiently known and experienced; and it behoved every sovereign, who regarded them as objects of punishment, to have inquired, previously into their religious principles, into the validity of those reasons, which had induced them, in the language of our author, to reject "the religion of nature, of Rome, and of their ancestors."¹ Had they made this inquiry, the Christians might have replied, that they conformed themselves strictly to the *genuine* religion of Nature, and that they had received
a new

¹ P. 570.

a new divine revelation, founded on the religion of nature, in consequence of every possible proof of its authenticity.

But it is not probable, that the pagans themselves, would have attempted to defend their system, by an appeal to the religion of nature, which they had long lost sight of amidst the fictions of their poets, and their customary worship, of deified *human* personages. They would have contented themselves rather, with their favourite plea of following the religion of their ancestors, and their country.* The ingenuity of modern times has advanced those laboured sophisms in defence of polytheism, which seem never to have occurred to polytheists themselves.*

H

It

* What deference was usually paid to this consideration amongst the ancients may appear from the doctrine, even of the enlightened Socrates; who amidst the most just and exalted ideas of the one true God, at the same time unhappily gave countenance to every various absurdity of idolatry, by his well-known decision, that the Gods ought to be worshipped, according to the customs of the state. (Νόμῳ πολλῶς.) See Xenoph. mem.

* See the late Mr. Hume's Natural History of religion,

It is certain, that the persecutors of Christianity, did not inquire, with that candour which reason itself might have suggested, into the grounds of that *obstinacy*, which they so hastily condemned. And even their own proceedings, their omission of punishment at one time, (while the principles and conduct of the Christians, still remained the same,) nay, their mitigation of it, at another, serve to shew, that they were in general conscious of the injustice of inflicting punishment.*

It ought not to be omitted, that our historian ascends beyond the proper limits of his history, to state to us, the persecution under Nero.

* It was on this ground, and surely with much reason, that Tertullian attacked the inconsistency of Trajan's proceedings. "O sententiam necessitate confusam! negat inquirendos, ut innocentes, et mandat puniendos, ut nocentes. Parcit et sævit; dissimulat, et animadvertit. Quid temet ipsum censurâ circumvenis? Si damnas, cur non et inquiris? Si non inquiris, cur non & absolvis?" Apolog. c. 2. Our author considers this censure (note 58. p. lxxx) as inconsistent with his acknowledgment, that Trajan's rescript was a relaxation of the ancient penal laws. But what inconsistency is there, in acknowledging candidly what the emperor *had* done, but insisting at the same time, that he ought to have done *more*?

Nero. It is easier to see the reason of this digression from his subject, than to justify the propriety of it. The intent is, to blot out, if possible from the page of history, one distinguished persecution of the Christians, by the assistance, of a refined conjecture.¹

To admit willingly that Tacitus composed his description of Nero's cruelty, at the distance of sixty years from the event—still let it be remembered, that the event happened in his own life time, tho' it might be in his infancy. Would the true history of such signal cruelty, detested even by the Romans themselves, have been forgotten even in the course of one man's life? If this supposition cannot be admitted, if "THE ANNALIST,"² must have been informed of the real truth, from "the narratives of contemporaries," the cha-

¹ "Most of the moderns," says our author (note 124. p. lxxxiv) have seized the occasion" (arising from the uncertainty with regard to Aurelian's proceedings) "of *gaining* a few "extraordinary martyrs." It must be allowed, that he himself uses no less diligence on every occasion, in trying to *abolish* the memory of reputed martyrs.

² P. 536.

character of "the PHILOSOPHER" will but ill excuse him for having disguised it, in complaisance to the "knowledge, or prejudices of the time of Hadrian."

By this mode of arguing, if the conjecture should be established, the character of the historian is sacrificed.

Let us turn now to the conjecture itself. It depends wholly, on the uncertain position, that the Christians in the time of Nero, were called GALILÆANS. I call it, at least, uncertain, because the testimony appealed to, will not support it, sufficiently for our author's purpose. It is rather in some sort proved that the Christians could not be called Galilæans in the reign of Nero.

Suidas informs us "that in the time of the emperor Claudius, (the predecessor of Nero) they who had *before* been called Nazareans and Galilæans, received a new name
at

* P. 536.

* Dr. Lardner who is appealed to, has only proved that the Christians were called GALILÆANS, *before the time of Nero*, and again after it (on the testimony of one writer only) in the third century.

at Antioch, and were called Christians".¹
 There is no positive evidence to prove our author's assertion, and there is very probable evidence, to contradict the supposition.

Pliny,² Suetonius, and the emperor Adrian, at the beginning of the second century, all use the appellation of Christians,

And in the course of the same century, the two Antonines, Celsus, and Galen, in their several testimonies, each adopt the same title of distinction.³ If we suppose the name of Galilæans to have been still in use, even after the times of Claudius, either during the reign of Nero or his successors, this difficulty remains to be accounted for, how such a variety of heathen writers should all have made use of a different term.

But were we even to admit the supposition, the conjecture would still be perplexed with material difficulties. Can it yet be conceived, that the innocent Galilæans at *Rome* would

¹ Lardner (Jewish and Heathen testimonies) vol. 2. p. 102 and 103. Suidas. V. Ναζαῖρος

² See Lardner.

³ See the same author.

would be confounded with the guilty zealots in *Judea*, whose rebellious conduct could not but distinguish them from those whose peaceable principles, gave no offence?

The one were "the friends," the other, "the enemies of human kind."† A difference of character too remarkable to be lost, under one general name, when the followers of Judas had their own proper *distinction*, of zealots, if not, as some think of GAULONITES also.

May we not say too, that a conjecture started in opposition to the most express testimony, rests on very slight grounds, when it is to be supported by "the *extreme conciseness*"* of the style of the historian, however remarkable his conciseness may be, in matters of less importance? It must be esteemed a very remarkable conciseness in the historian, and surely a very culpable one, if
in

† Ch xvi. p. 537.

* P. 536. "we may therefore (that is on account of Tacitus's extreme conciseness) presume to imagine some probable cause, which could direct the cruelty of Nero, against the Christians of Rome."

in relating a fact, which stood in need of every apology, he has trusted "to the curiosity or reflexion of his readers" to supply the only apology that could be suggested for it. Here the character of Tacitus, is again sacrificed in order to maintain a favourite conjecture, (in behalf of one, "whose rage, "it is confessed," had been usually directed "against virtue and innocence"*) at all events.²

We must not yet dismiss this celebrated passage. The mention of its integrity, has served to introduce a severe decision concerning another celebrated testimony (not indeed on the same subject) in the works of Josephus. "The passage concerning Jesus
"Christ,

* The expression of Tertullian, is of the same kind. P. 537.
"Qui scit illum, intelligere potest, non nisi grande bonum, a
"Nerone damnatum.

² "The difficulties with which it is perplexed," (p. 534) are made a plea for the introduction of our author's observations on this passage. But these difficulties, are not pointed out to us; and other commentators, the accurate Lardner in particular, do not appear to have discovered any. One only difficulty seems to attend the passage, that it cannot be thought capable of the new interpretation put upon it.

“Christ, which was inserted into the text
 “of Josephus, between the time of Origen,
 “and that of Eusebius, may furnish,” we
 are told, “an example, of no vulgar for-
 “gery.”¹ Perhaps we may borrow an ar-
 gument from our author himself, in defence
 of this passage. If “the reputation of Ta-
 “citus, guarded his text from the interpo-
 “lations of pious fraud,”² something also
 ought to be attributed, in this respect, to
 the reputation of Josephus. Both himself
 and his works were so well received among
 the Romans, that he was enrolled a citizen
 of Rome, and had a statue erected to his
 memory.³ His writings also were admitted
 into the imperial library. It should be re-
 membered too, that not only the Romans,
 may be looked upon as the guardians of the
 integrity of his text, but that the Jews also,
 would certainly use all diligence, to prevent
 any interpolation, in favour of the Christian
 cause

¹ Note 35. p. lxxviii.

² Ch. 16. p. 535.

³ Minucius Felix, in the very next age, mistook him for a
 ROMAN. “De Judæis, scripta eorum require; vel si Ro-
 “MANI MAVIS, FLAVII JOSEPHI.

cause. Yet it cannot be discovered that any objection, was ever made to this passage in the earlier ages.

The various arguments of many learned writers, will serve still better to protect this passage from suspicion.¹ And had our author been careful to avoid, either the imputation of interposing his own judgment, too dogmatically, or of concealing studiously the important observations of others, he should have spoken of the question, as being still undetermined.²

I

For

¹ See in particular, among many other authors on this subject, Cave's *historia literaria*—Dr. Willes's two dissertations prefixed to L'Estrange's *Josephus*, and Whiston's first dissertation, prefixed to his own translation. In each of these latter writers there may be found a critical analysis of the passage.—That in Whiston, is quoted from Daubuz *de testimonio Josephi*. Lond. 1706.—See also, Bp. Parker's demonstration of the laws of nature and Christianity, which Dr. Lardner does not appear to have consulted. It contains perhaps the best answer, that can be found, to such objections, as are principally insisted on.

² Dr. Lardner, while he openly controverts the authenticity of the passage, by many laboured arguments, adopts however, a very different language. "This passage is received

For my own part, when I consider its agreement with the general stile of Josephus,¹ the long undisputed title it enjoyed, through the course of fifteen centuries,² and how much every objection raised against it rests only on presumptive proofs,³ while positive evidence

“ceived by many learned men, as genuine. By others it is
 “rejected, as an interpolation. It is allowed on all hands,
 “THAT IT IS IN ALL THE COPIES OF JOSEPHUS’S WORKS
 “NOW EXTANT, BOTH PRINTED AND MANUSCRIPT.
 “Nevertheless it may be for several reasons called in question.”

Vol. I. ch. iv. p. 151.—A very candid and complete state of the arguments on *each* side, may be found in Vernet, *Traité de la religion Chretienne*. Sect. VII. ch. 11. Dr. Lardner has not given us the answers that have been offered to his objections.

¹ See this accurately stated by Daubuz, whose criticism may be found in Havercamp’s edition, as well as Whiston’s translation.

² It appears to have been first publicly attacked by Tanaquil Faber, about the middle of last century. Perhaps the character that Mr. Gibbon has given of this author, in his former work, may on this occasion, be applied, in a bad sense, rather than a good one.—“*La Finesse de Taneguy le Fevre.*”
Essai, &c. p. 13.

³ One of the principal objections insisted on, is drawn from the *silence* of Origen, and other of the fathers, concerning this passage. The words of Bp. Parker, seem to deserve attention.

evidence may be produced in its favour, from the consent of the most ancient manuscripts, I cannot but incline to the side of those writers, who are satisfied, that it is not an interpolation. If it be a forgery, I agree with our author, that it is, “no vulgar forgery.”¹ But to return from the digression which this note has occasioned.

“Whatever
tention. “ This is the hard condition that our critics have of
“ late put upon all authors, to quote all that ever they read,
“ and to think of every thing that is pertinent to their cause;
“ but this seems too severe an imposition upon the memories of
“ mankind.” What too if some of these fathers could not have quoted this passage with propriety, according to the nature of their design? It is the evident design of Justin Martyr, and Tertullian, to dispute against the Jews, purely out of the writings of the *prophets*. Our author laments that the fathers *in general* draw their arguments principally from the prophecies. (see p. 517.)—Perhaps too the reasoning of Dr. Lardner himself, *mutatis mutandis*, may well be applied on this occasion. “Supposing Josephus not to have said any thing of Jesus Christ, some may ask, what could be the reason of it? And how can it be accounted for? To which I might answer, that such a question is rather more *curious* than judicious and important.” (Testimonies, vol. 1. ch. iv. p. 168.)

¹ Some of the objections that seem principally to have influenced our author in forming his opinion, are perhaps easily removed.

“ Whatever opinion may be entertained of
 “ his conjecture,” says our author, “ it is
 “ evident that the effects, as well as the
 “ cause of Nero’s persecution, were confined
 “ to the walls of Rome.”¹ This is by no
 means evident, when the matter is fully stat-
 ed.

His own proof (and the only proof) is,
 that the Spanish inscription in Gruter, is a
 manifest and acknowledged imposition.² But
 this is at least not *universally* acknowledg-
 ed.³

Admit

removed. Why should it excite our wonder so particularly that
 Josephus has born witness to the miracles and resurrection of
 Jesus, when Celsus himself has done the same? That Josephus
 acknowledges him to be the Messiah, we cannot grant. St.
 Jerome’s version (in the fourth century) renders this part of
 the passage, not, *hic erat Christus*, but *hic credebatur esse*
Christus. And Josephus elsewhere doubts, whether Moses as
 well as Christ, was not more than man. (Antiq. l. 3. c. 15.)
 It is a common form of speech too, with such Greek and Latin
 writers, as Josephus often imitates, to give the title of Gods,
 to all great and extraordinary persons.

¹ P. 537.

² Note 42. on Ch. xvi. p. lxxix.

³ Dr. Lardner acknowledges the authenticity of this inscrip-
 tion to be doubtful, but is himself strongly inclined to receive
 it as genuine. vol. 1. ch. 3.

Admit however, that the inscription is spurious, there are other evidences from divers antient Christian writers, which ought not to have been suppressed, and which tend to prove that the Christians suffered in the *provinces*, as well as the city.¹ Nero's laws against the Christians must be understood to have been general laws. And those who contend that these laws were repealed by the senate after his death, acknowledge nevertheless, that there were such laws.²

Should it be thought therefore, that Nero's persecution was not confined to the walls of Rome (an opinion which Suetonius's testimony strongly countenances)³ it will be probable also in opposition to another assertion of our author's, "that the religious te-
nets

¹ Lardner, as above.

² For instance, Mosheim de rebus Christianis ante C. M. Sect. 2. vii. Suetonius also mentions Nero's proceedings against the Christians, along with other *ordinances* and *institutions* of Nero, in ROME. Dr. Lardner also hesitates not to affirm, that there *had* been laws in force against the Christians, in the time of Nero and Domitian.

³ See Lardner's argument from it,

“ nets of the Christians, *were* made a subject
 “ of inquiry.”

His attempt to defend the cause of Nero is succeeded by an apology for Domitian. It is doubted whether this emperor, any more than Nero, can be ranked among the persecutors of Christianity. We will refer the question wholly, to the unsuspected testimony of an heathen historian, which, important as it is, our author hath passed over in silence. He has produced his testimony so far only as it relates to Clemens and Domitilla; yet in the very same passage, it follows immediately, that “ on a like accusation, MANY OTHERS also were condemned. Some of whom, were put to death, others suffered the confiscation of their goods.”² It should seem now, that the cruelty of Domitian, may justly, “ be branded with the name of the second “ persecution.”³

We

¹ P. 537.

² Επειχθη δε αμφοιν εγκλημα αβεστντος, εφ ης η ΑΛΛΟΙ ες τας των Ιεδαιων ηθη εωσκελλοντες ΠΟΛΛΟΙ κατεδικαοθησαν. Και οι μιν απεθανον, οι δε των ουτιων εξεζητησαν.

Dion. Hist. l. 67.

³ P. 539. From the criticism of Mosheim already refer'd

We come now to consider the conduct of the Roman princes and magistrates, as to the nature of the punishments they inflicted.

Their bold apologist, has not scrupled to affirm, that "they were moderate in the use of their punishments."

It is indeed true, that the Christian, often had the alternative of life and death, set before him. It is true, he might meet with pardon; but it was a pardon offered to one, who had committed no crime. It was a pardon offered on terms, however they may appear "easy"¹ to our author, which could not be complied with. It mattered not to him, whose conscience forbad his compliance altogether, whether he was called upon to make open sacrifice of his faith, "by casting a few grains of incense upon the altar"² or by prostrating himself solemnly before

to, and from the opinion of Dodwell (*Diff. Cyprianicæ* *Diff.* xi.) both founded on a remarkable passage of Tertullian (*cæ leges quas Trajanus ex parte frustratus est*) it may be collected with much probability, that DOMITIAN as well as NERO had passed edicts against the Christians.

¹ P. 543. ² *ibid*

before some detested idol. In either case the very "applause"¹ which he might expect, would in effect prove that he was equally understood, to have made an explicit renunciation of his faith. The proper question therefore will be, whether those who imposed on their inoffensive subjects, the cruel necessity of betraying their consciences, in order to save their life, can be at all defended; not whether the terms proposed, might in some sort be considered rather as "a legal evasion"² than a formal declaration. It should ever be remembered, that it was not the profligate criminal, but the inoffensive citizen; it was not the daring enemy of society, but the friend of mankind, that was the victim of the various punishments of Roman cruelty.

But there are yet other striking instances of clemency, which in our author's opinion, decorate the annals of Roman persecution. Death was by no means the punishment, on all occasions. These *humane* judges, "contented themselves for the most part, with the

¹ P. 543.² P. 545.

“ the milder chastisements of imprisonment,
 “ exile, or slavery in the mines ;”¹ nay more
 than this, those who endured this last *mild*
 punishment² “ were permitted, by the hu-
 “ manity, or the *negligence* of their keepers,
 “ to build chapels, and freely to profess
 “ their religion, in the midst of those dreary
 “ habitations.”³

There may be those, we conclude, who
 are not so sensible of the virtues of the prin-
 ces and magistrates of Rome; who find no
 comfort for the persecuted, in the reflection
 that “ the several transient persecutions that
 “ were carried on, served only to revive the
 “ zeal, and restore the discipline of the faith-
 “ ful”⁴ (through the peculiar virtue of the
 faithful themselves) who think it no apology
 for unjust cruelty, that “ the moments of

K

“ ex-

¹ P. 545. ² P. 583.

³ From Eusebius (de Mart. Palæst. c. 13.) it appears, that
 even this indulgence gave offence. The governor of Palestine
 complained to Maximin of their enjoying this liberty. In
 consequence of the complaint, they were dispersed into different
 parts, and treated with additional cruelty.

⁴ P. 555.

“ extraordinary rigour were compensated by
 “ much longer intervals of peace and secu-
 “ rity.”¹

Such will perhaps remark, that to contend for the humanity of the Roman magistrates, by alleging that they inflicted only imprisonment, exile, or slavery, on their inoffensive subjects, when they might have inflicted death, can only be considered, as an attempt to prove that they were not inhuman, by shewing that they might have been more inhuman.²

But in fact the premises as well as the conclusion, of such an argument, may be denied. In the latter persecutions of the Christians, the refined cruelty of their enemies purposely avoided

¹ P. 555:

² Other insufficient arguments of the same kind, or rather palpable fallacies, might be pointed out. Our author argues elsewhere, in favour of the judicial proceedings of the Roman Magistrates, by turning our attention to the proceedings of a *modern inquisitor*. (p. 553) And he closes his work, by reminding us, that Christians in later times, “ have inflicted far
 “ greater severities on each other, than they had experienced
 “ from the zeal of infidels.” That is, he attempts to justify *infidels* for having done wrong, by shewing that *Christians* have acted still more wrongly.

avoided inflicting death on them in order to inflict punishments on them, which they themselves, thought more formidable. The words of a learned writer, who while he has laboured to lessen the number of actual martyrs, among the first Christians, has not been insensible of their real sufferings, may serve to place this matter in its proper light.

“ The conduct of their persecutors, in studiously avoiding to inflict death, that they might make their torments more cruel, and protract them to a longer duration, produced this effect, that the fewer martyrdoms there were, the more illustrious the confessions became, and rivaled the fame of the martyrdoms of other times. And as the persecutors thought to elude by this art of inflicting the most dreadful tortures,¹ but no deaths, the infamy of a
“ bloody

¹ The various cruelties of sometimes burning the sinews of the knees, and sometimes burning out the eyes, as is particularly related by Eusebius, (*De vitâ Const.* l. 1. c. 58. and elsewhere) were in general adopted, instead of inflicting death. Lactantius's words are too remarkable to be omitted. “ *Illud vero pessimum*

“ bloody administration, they indulged their
 “ native cruelty the more freely, without the
 “ hazard of losing their character.”¹

Amidst the horrors of such scenes, one is rather inclined, to wish the number of martyrs lessened, and the received faith of history, shaken and overturned. But while we avoid carefully the legendary inventions of later ages, while we at least wish not to extend the number of holy martyrs beyond the strictest letter of authentic evidence, we owe it to their memory, not to abandon the testimony that is afforded us, or admit too hastily such objections as are not valid. While I shall not therefore in any sort enter fully into the question of the numbers of the primitive martyrs, I shall yet so far attempt a di-

“ *pestimum genus est, cui clementiæ species falsa blanditur ;*
 “ *ille gravior, ille sævior carnifex qui neminem statuit occi-*
 “ *dere. Exquilitos dolores corporibus immittunt, & nihil a-*
 “ *liud evitant quam ut ne torti moriantur. Non curassent*
 “ *tam sollicitè quos amassent.*”

¹ Dodwelli *Dissertationes Cyprianicæ*. Diss. xi. It should be observed that his arguments tend chiefly, to lessen only, the numbers of *modern* martyrologies.

discussion of it, as to point out the uncertainty, if not, fallacy of such arguments, as our author has alleged in support of his calculations. - The testimony of Origen, with regard to the small number of martyrs, that had died, for the sake of the Christian religion, naturally attracts our attention. But it will cease to astonish us, when we recollect, that he lived before the time of the severest and longest persecutions that the church experienced, and that his testimony must not therefore be received as generally, as it is stated to us. ' It cannot extend to the persecutions either of Decius or Diocletian.

That

' Dodwell in the use of this testimony, has been more accurate than our author; he has added the words, "*ante suam aetatem.*" However obvious such a distinction is, it yet may be forgotten; and we see, it is a distinction of importance.

It is the opinion of the judicious Mosheim, that this passage can only be understood to relate to the number of martyrs, as compared with the whole body of Christians, not as considered collectively, in themselves. In the one sense, they might well be said to be few, in the other, perhaps they were justly to be called, many.

That, under Decius is acknowledged to have been one of the most rigid that the Christians suffered. And that a far greater number of martyrs, than had suffered under any one prince before, must have perished in the course of the long persecution, under Diocletian, may naturally be concluded.

But even during this persecution, if we adopt our author's calculation, the number of martyrs was far less, than has been usually imagined. His calculation is founded on Eusebius's catalogue of the Martyrs of Palestine. It may perhaps appear, that the superstructure, is too weighty for the foundation. It may at least be disputed, whether the passage of Eusebius, can be said to contain that positive evidence, which our author has collected from it. It is certain, that he does not expressly say *no more than* ninety two Christians suffered.

His words are, "these were" (not there were *no more than these*) the martyrdoms inflicted in Palestine.¹ A probable argument may

¹ Ταῦτα μὲν τὰ κατὰ παλαισινῇ ἐν ὅλοις τοῖς οὐκ ἐπὶ συνπαρά-
στα μαρτυρία. C. 13.

may be advanced from his method, on other occasions, to evince, that he does not mean his catalogue should be looked upon as complete. He sometimes selects out of many martyrdoms a few only distinguished by some eminent circumstances, for particular mention. But I do not insist particularly on this conjecture, though it may receive countenance from our observing, that the martyrs of Palestine, whom he has enumerated, are all distinguished either by their superior characters, or by the peculiar circumstances of their sufferings, and their exemplary fortitude in enduring them.

A stronger argument may be derived from his own words, as they immediately follow the passage in question. He proceeds, “such
 “ was the persecution, which began amongst
 “ us with the destruction of the Churches,
 “ and which afterwards rose to a great height,
 “ by the successive persecutions of the governors, in which the various trials of
 “ those who contended for the faith, raised up
 “ an *innumerable multitude of Martyrs* in every
 “ province, in the countries that reach from
 “ Africa,

“ Africa, and throughout all *Egypt*, and Syria, and from the East, and round about, “ to the region of Illyricum.”

If then the sense of the passage, in respect of the support that has been borrowed from it, for our author's hypothesis, be, but uncertain, let it be remembered, that “ the “ important conclusion” he draws concerning the number of martyrs, is in consequence uncertain; if it should be thought that the testimony of Eusebius, considered altogether, necessarily leads us to conclude that there were either more than ninety-two who suffered in Palestine, or that very great numbers suffered in other provinces, let it be remembered that the conclusion is false.

The declaration of Eusebius, elsewhere indeed, appears even to our author, “ to “ contradict

Τοιαύτος ο καθ' ημάς διωγμός, ἀρξάμενος μὲν ἀπὸ τῆς τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν καθαιρέσεως, εἰς μέγα δὲ προκοφάς, ἐν ταῖς κατὰ χρόνους τῶν ἀρχόντων ἐπαναστάσει· ἐν αἷς πολυτρόποι καὶ πολυεῖδεις τῶν ὑπὲρ εὐσεβείας καὶ θελημάτων ἀγωνεῖς ἀνθρῶπων τε πλῆθος μαρτύρων κατὰ πάσαις ἐπαρχίαις συνέστησαντο· ἐν τοῖς ἀπὸ Λιβυῆς καὶ δι' ὅλης Αἰγυπτου, Συρίας τε, καὶ τῆς ἀπ' ἀνατολῆς, καὶ κυκλῶ, μέχρι τοῦ κατὰ τὸ ἰλλυρικὸν κλίμα παρατηρουσι.

Euseb. de mart. Palæst. c. 13.

“contradict his moderate computation,”¹ but he endeavours to obviate this objection by exhibiting a severe accusation, against the historian.

We shall willingly take for granted that the words *ισοψημεν* and *υπομεναιτας* are altogether as ambiguous as he has represented them. Concerning the sense attributed to the first, it matters little indeed, whether we admit it or not. If Eusebius only *heard* of the many martyrs that he makes mention of, instead of *seeing* them suffer, his testimony is still sufficient, while his general character remains unimpeached. Nay it must be allowed that, as he was himself on the spot, he must have possessed the very best means of information. Indeed the word signifies, to hear, only so far as it signifies to hear in consequence of *enquiry*.

L

After

¹ Note 181. p. lxxxvii—Even before we enter into a particular review of the accusation, by looking back to a passage already quoted, from Eusebius, in which he treats of the same persecution, we may observe how little reason there can be for supposing him to have adopted “*a cautious language*” in speaking of the martyrdoms of Egypt, when he has elsewhere, so positively asserted the great number of them.

After this state of the real force of the word, surely Eusebius may be acquitted of the charge of having adopted it, as being capable of a double sense, merely from considering how little advantage could be gained, by such equivocation. Respecting the latter word, we presume, that the historian will at once stand acquitted, of the severe charge of "providing to himself a secure evasion" in the equivocal sense of it, when it is shewn, that one of the two senses attributed to it, is palpably inconsistent, even to a degree of absurdity, with the rest of the sentence. To evince this, let us adopt for a moment, the sense which it is supposed capable of, and apply it to the passage in question. It will then stand thus:

"We ourselves also, when we were on
 "the spot, saw (or heard of) many in one
 "day, some of whom EXPECTED to be be-
 "headed, and some to suffer by fire; so
 "that the murderer's sword became blunt-
 "ed, and unable to perform its office,
 and

“ and the executioners themselves, thro’
“ fatigue, succeeded one another, by turns.” *

The rhetorical figure in the latter part of this passage, must be considered as altogether extraordinary, if it can be maintained, that the historian meant to provide himself a secure evasion, by persuading his readers, if necessary, that the executioners were tired, and their swords blunted, from their *attendance*, to execute the punishments, which others EXPECTED but never underwent.

It ought to be added too, that in the beginning of the very same chapter, and in that preceding it, Eusebius has again made use of the same word, in such a manner, that if we give a like sense to it, we must fall into a like absurdity. In the one passage we must understand him to speak only of calamities which the MARTYRS² in Thebais

* *Ισορησάμεν δὲ καὶ αὐτοὶ, ἐπὶ τῶν τότε γενομένων πλείων ἀνδρῶν κατὰ μίαν ἡμέραν, τῆς μὲν τῆς κεφαλῆς ἀποτομὴν ὑπομεινάντας, τῆς δὲ τὴν διὰ πυρὸς τιμωρίαν· ὡς ἀμβλυνεσθαι φονευσίᾳ τοῖς σιδηροῖς, ἀτονῆτα τε διαθλασθαι· αὐτῆς τε τῆς αἰαιρουμένουσιν ὑποκαμνοῦσας ἀμύδασι ἀλλήλους διαδεχέσθαι.* Euseb. Lib. viii. cap. 9. (De iis qui in Thebaide passi sunt.)

² The very word *μαρτυρεῖς* might be sufficient to ascertain the sense of this passage, since Eusebius is remarkably accurate in distinguishing between martyrs and confessors. (*ομολογηταί*)

baïs EXPECTED, tho' he adds immediately, that they were tormented to death; and in the other to assert only, that numbers EXPECTED different deaths, tho' it is subjoined, that some of these were *drowned*, some *starved*, some *burnt*, and some *crucified*.

May we not conclude then, that this accusation serves to refute itself, by its own absurdity, and to exhibit a very unhappy instance of refined criticism?¹

But a yet heavier attack on the venerable historian, remains behind. "He very
"frankly confesses, says our author, that
"he has related whatsoever might redound
"to the glory, and that he has suppressed
"all that could tend to the disgrace of religion."² Let us at least hear Eusebius, in his own defence, before we utterly condemn him. We may however, venture

to

¹ I do not take notice of our author's reflection on the *artful management of the historian*, in choosing Thebais for his scene, since till it can be *proved* that Thebais was not the scene of such cruelty, the whole is a mere begging of the question; nor can I make a compliment of *granting* it.

² P. 583.

to assert, that there is an inconsistency in the accusation, even at first sight, upon the strength of an authority, that even the critical exactness of our author, will not condemn. When he *himself* informs us “ of “ THE CORRUPTION OF MANNERS AND “ PRINCIPLES” (among the first Christians) “ so FORCIBLY LAMENTED by Eusebius,” I am totally at a loss to reconcile the historian’s conduct on this occasion, with that of one, who suppresses all that can tend to the disgrace of his cause. For once at least, even his accuser must confess, that the historian has been very remarkably inconsistent with himself.

Still however, his own words, as *they stand represented to us*, must upon the whole serve to condemn him, if no more favourable interpretation of them, can justly be adopted. Some alleviation of the charge at least, I presume, rather an entire refutation of it, may be derived from permitting Eusebius to speak for himself more fully, in the passages referred to. As his character is at
stake,

stake, in the translation I shall give, I shall prefer exactness to elegance.

After describing a variety of affecting circumstances that had attended the persecutions of the first Christians, as *seen by himself*, in the first passage, he proceeds thus:

“ But it is not our part to describe the
 “ sad calamities which at last befel them,
 “ since it does not agree with our plan, to
 “ relate their dissensions and wickedness,
 “ before the persecution ; on which account
 “ we have determined to relate nothing
 “ more concerning them, than may serve to
 “ justify the divine judgment. We there-
 “ fore have not been induced to make men-
 “ tion either of those who were tempted in
 “ the persecution, nor of those who made
 “ utter shipwreck of their salvation, and
 “ were sunk of their own accord in the
 “ depths of the storm ; but shall only add
 “ those things to our general history, which
 “ may in the first place be profitable to
 “ ourselves, and afterwards to posterity”.

On

¹ Αλλά τούτων μὲν οὐχ ἡμετέροι διαγραφῆν τὰς ἐπὶ τελείᾳ σκυθρωπᾶς
 συμφόρας· ἐπεὶ καὶ τὰς προσδεῖν τοὶ διωγμὸν διασῶσις τε αὐτῶν εἰς ἀλλή-

On a candid examination of this passage, may we not say, that no just accusation against Eusebius, can be deduced from it? He explains his own plan consistently; he considers himself according to it, not as a complete historian of the times, but rather as a *didactic*¹ writer, whose main object it is, to make his work, like the scriptures themselves, “profitable for doctrine.” As he treats only of the affairs of the church, the plan surely is at least excusable, perhaps peculiarly proper; and if he has been but faithful, in relating those facts which fall within the compass of his design (nor is any direct accusation as yet brought against him in

λας, καὶ αὐτοπίας, οὐχ ἡμῖν οἰκέον μνημὴν παραδίδουσι· διὸ καὶ πλεον ἔδει
 ἱστορησάμενοι περὶ αὐτῶν ἐγνώμεν, ἢ δι’ ὧν αὐτῶν τὴν θεῖαν δικαιοσύνην κρῖναι
 ἔσκουεν ἡδὲ τῶν πρὸς τοῦ διωγμοῦ πεπειραμένων, ἢ τῶν εἰς ἀπᾶν τῆς σωτη-
 ρίας νενάυαγχοτων, αὕτη τε γινώμη τοῖς τοῦ κλυδωνοῦ ἐναπορριφέντων βυ-
 θοῖς μνημὴν ποιήσασθαι προσηχθήμεν, μόνον δὲ ἑκεῖνα τῇ καθολῇ προσθη-
 σόμεν ἱστορίᾳ, ἃ πρῶτον μὲν ἡμῖν αὐτοῖς, ἔπειτα δὲ καὶ τοῖς μετ’ ἡμᾶς, γένοιτ’
 αὖ πρὸς ὠφελείας.

Euseb. Lib. viii. c. 2.

¹ His own declaration, made elsewhere, of his reasons for principally relating the martyrdoms that had been inflicted, confirms this idea.— οὐχ ἱστορικὴν αὐτοῦ μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ΔΙΔΑΣΚΑΛΙΚΗΝ περιέχον διηγήσιν.

Proem. ad Lib. 5. E. H.

in this respect) he is so far at least, consistent with himself, and may so far be depended on, for his relation of facts. Nay more, he will appear even to have conformed himself to that just idea of the principal duty of history, according to which, as elegantly stated by our author, "it undertakes to record the transactions of the past, for the INSTRUCTION of future ages." And let it be remarked still farther, that neither can he well be said to have "suppressed all that could tend to the disgrace of religion," who, while according to his more immediate design, he has not indeed particularly related such transactions, has yet openly and fully acknowledged them.

This, as well as the express nature of his design, will appear yet farther, on considering the other passage.

Eusebius here again, expressly mentions "dissentions among the confessors themselves," but again declares that it is his intent "to pass over all these things" agreeably to his former declaration. He then quotes

quotes the very words of scripture, as best descriptive of his immediate design, "Whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, these things he thinks it most suitable to an history of martyrs, to lay before his readers."

I shall add but one remark more. It should be remembered, that while Eusebius

M omits

"It is impossible to reconcile the express words of the charge exhibited, with any part of either of the passages appealed to. There is a remarkable agreement between the interpretation which Mr. Gibbon has adopted, and the French translation of Mons^r. Cousin. "He (Eusebius) has related whatever MIGHT REDOUND TO THE GLORY, and suppressed all that could tend to the disgrace of RELIGION," are the words of the former. "Ne voulant donc rien mettre devant les yeux de fideles, que ce qui peut RELEVER L'HONNEUR DE NOTRE RELIGION," are the words in which, the latter, according to his loose method of interpretation, has chosen to express what forms the substance of full three preceding sentences; and has at the same time misled, his readers, wholly as to the true sense of his author.

I leave it to others, to account for this striking similarity between the interpretations of Mr. Gibbon and Mons^r. Cousin.

omits the particular history of such transactions, as were disgraceful to the first Christians, he omits also the particular history of many of the oppressions, of their enemies.

I trust now, Eusebius, may still lay claim to the character of a faithful historian. Unless an author's right to choose his own subject can be contested, (and that too, for the particular benefit of his reader) no accusation can lie against him, from his own declaration, *fairly interpreted*.

But the character of this pious historian, seems indeed to have been peculiarly obnoxious to our author. At the close of his work, he is transported beyond the usual temper of his writings, and rises into a stile of the severest declamation, against "the
" courtly bishop."¹

He

¹ Dr. Jortin, whom, those who know the free turn of his writings, will not suspect of partiality, nor those who know his learning and diligence, of judging hastily, gives us a far different idea of Eusebius's character. "He had the favour
" and friendship of Constantine, which he seems never to have
" used in depressing or hurting others, or in getting any thing
" for himself; and he refused to change his bishoprick for
" a better." (Remarks on E. H. Vol. iii. p. 161.)

He has however fortunately himself furnished us with a strong case in point, that may serve to free the character of Eusebius, from the vague imputation thrown upon him.

In the very same instance, in which, to adopt our author's phrase, "*it suited the purpose*"¹ of Lactantius, to place the death of "Maxentius, among those of the persecutors," Eusebius has exempted even this "*vanquished rival*" of Constantine, from the charge of persecution.

Yet how natural was it for "*the passionate declaimer,*"² according to the idea our author has given us of him, to have caught fire on the occasion and availed himself of his

¹ Note 167. p. lxxxvii.—The same phrase is elsewhere applied to the writings of the truly-respectable Bp. Pearson. (See note 92. p. lxxxiii.) They that are well read in the *Free Enquiry*, &c. will not perhaps be at a loss to discover the disciple of Dr. Middleton, on this, as well as other occasions. "*Forged for a particular purpose,*" and "*singularly adapted to his argument,*" are some of the phrases, which the *Free Enquirer* applies to the writings of the most venerable of the Fathers of the Church.

² P. 584.

“*exclusive privilege*”¹ to stain the memory of this most distinguished rival of his “gracious sovereign” with all possible infamy.

Lactantius was distinguished by the favour of Constantine, as well as Eusebius; but it could not certainly have *suit*ed the purpose of the one, less than of the other, to place Maxentius in the most odious light. It may not perhaps be impossible, to reconcile, in some degree, the different accounts of these two authors. Though the prudence of the tyrant, led him to tolerate the Christians, as a sect, yet his acknowledged cruelties towards his subjects, in general,² may well be conceived, to have been occasionally exercised, on some at least among the Christians. Lactantius, perhaps thought that facts of this kind justified him in placing his death among those of the persecutors; Eusebius, even *courtly* and *passionate* as he was, chose rather to re-
late

¹ P. 584.

² See our author's idea of his character, and of the motives of his conduct towards the Christians, P. 577.

late his general conduct, than to dwell on particular facts.

Having now accompanied our author to the close of his laborious work, let us turn back to estimate the true nature and force of his disquisitions, by supposing for a moment, the utmost success to have attended them.

They contain an attempt to account for the growth of Christianity, from the end of the *second*¹ century, by the aid of human causes. They tend to lessen the supposed numbers of the first Christians, while they unavoidably shew, at the same time, that their numbers were considerable. Other testimonies not adduced by our author, confirm the same idea.² They tend to apologize for the conduct

¹ See remarks at the beginning of this tract. p. 4.

² There is a very remarkable testimony, in particular, of the *Apostate* Julian, the declared enemy of Christianity. He supposes, that there were in *many cities of Greece and Italy multitudes of believers in Jesus*, before John wrote his gospel. See the passage quoted by Dr. Lardner, vol. iv. ch. xlv. Though we may have some reason to suspect the zealous temper of Tertullian, of a degree of exaggeration, his testimony

duct of the Roman government, towards their persecuted subjects, but they no where assert that the Christians in general, were guilty of such crimes as deserved the severest punishments. They tend to censure the uncharitable sentiments and the private vices of a few individuals, but they bear witness, in a general view, to "the pure, and austere morals of the Christians."

What then if our historian had succeeded, even, in every one of his positions?

We had still remained in full possession of all the most important evidences of our Religion,

is yet too striking to be omitted. "*Hesterni sumus, & vestra omnia implevimus, urbes, insulas, castella, municipia, conciliabula, castra ipsa, tribus, decurias, senatum, forum; sola vobis relinquimus templa.*" Apolog. c. 36.

To this human cause, much certainly may be attributed. Julian, the avowed enemy of Christianity bears honourable testimony to the manners of the first Christians, in attributing the success of the gospel, principally to this circumstance. He reproaches the Gentiles for not imitating their philanthropy, and their distinguished charity, in maintaining, besides their own poor, the poor of their enemies also. Τεφρουσι δε οι δυσσεβεις Γαλιλαιοι, προς τοις εαυτων, κ' τους ημετερους. Epist. xlix. edit. Paris 1630, 4to.

gion, of the evidence even of its MIRACULOUS PROPAGATION, during the age of the Apostles, and of the extraordinary continuance of it, for at least a century afterwards. We had still surveyed with pleasure the general characters of the first Christians, and we had had sufficient occasion to admire the amazing fortitude of some thousands of martyrs, and of a far greater number of confessors.

In any case, it would remain yet, to achieve many other, still more difficult labours, before the melancholy triumph, of having eradicated Christianity out of the minds of men, could be enjoyed by any one.

But what then, shall we say, if our author be found to have failed altogether in his attempts; if his several *human* causes, are either

^a Our author's own calculation (the certainty of which we have had occasion to call in question) according to *the annual consumption*, of martyrs which he supposes to have taken place, in the course of *one* persecution only, amounts to near two thousand. (See p. 585) Taking in every other persecution, we may safely say, *many* thousands.

ther inadequately, or improperly alleged; * if his conjectures are ill supported, and his arguments in general, weak and fallacious? Christianity surely derives a new triumph on this, as well as on former occasions, from the unsuccessful attack that has been made upon it. However we may admire the talents of our author, we have but too much reason to lament the use he has made of them. His extensive researches into antiquity, and his polished stile, interest us in his favour. But he is the less entitled to our thanks for the agreeable entertainment

* It may perhaps be remarked justly, that our author's own recapitulation of the five causes principally insisted on (p. 502) does not give that force to them, which the use they were intended for, requires. They are summoned. (p. 450) to account for the rapid *growth* of the Christian church. It appears in the end, that at the most, they can account only for the continuance, and *defence* of it. The first, we are told, inspired the Christians with that valour, which *disdained to capitulate*; the three succeeding causes, "supplied their valour, with the "most formidable arms" the last, "united their courage, and "directed their arms." Through the whole of this delineation, no other idea can be discovered, but that of a successful *resistance* to a persecuting enemy, not of a triumphant victory over them, without bloodshed, by making friends, of enemies.

tainment he has set before us, while it is our duty to complain, of his ungenerous treatment of Christianity. The characters of his history, at one time utter the most false imputations, at another, oppose, even the sacred truths of religion, with ridicule, instead of argument; and use those weapons, which are alone to be dreaded, because they are indirectly aimed.

We have seen him, influenced too often, by the same malicious spirit; we have seen him, aiming the most deadly and unmerited blows, at the respectable character of a grave historian, and pleading the cause of paganism, with his utmost eloquence, as if retained in its service, by some lawful obligation. He has not however, failed to remember that "the wife" of this world "abuse

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¹ Besides some other similar instances already pointed out, our author has not hesitated to *close* a sentence of praise, with the impious raileries of Celsus. In the offensive language of this virulent enemy of Christianity, the *miraculous* birth of Christ, is represented to us as "equivocal" and the life of him WHO WENT ABOUT DOING GOOD, is stigmatized as a "*wandering life*." (See p. 526.)

“ in doubt and dispute, their vain superiority of reason and knowledge.”¹ And this melancholy instance of human frailty, might perhaps have afforded an useful caution. May he enjoy, unenvied, the honourable triumph of being justly distinguished, in the republic of letters! I cannot but add a wish, that he had secured to himself also, the far nobler, heart-felt triumph of having benefited mankind, by using his endeavours to promote among them, the only true “system of love and harmony.”

An opportunity will yet present itself, in the intended prosecution of his work, for making some atonement to the injured Genius of Christianity. The remarkable period of its first civil establishment, may naturally suggest, the respect that is due to it, from every good citizen, who lives under the protection of those laws, of which it is the only firm support.

But the friend of mankind, will be still more strongly influenced by the reflection, that should his writings, have been the means of depriving but one honest man of his

¹ P. 474.

his faith in Christianity, he has robbed that man of all his better hopes, and has taken from him, that source of comfort, for which he can offer him no equivalent.

Such considerations may properly be urged even to those, who doubt of the truth of Revelation.

But I may add, that in any cause, to form decisions on a slight examination, to adopt unwarrantable censures, and to follow fervilely the objections of others,¹ is utterly repugnant

¹ Our author's too fond attachment to Dr. Middleton, appears to have betrayed him into one very remarkable misrepresentation. "Irenæus" he informs us, (p. 475) in an age in which the gift of tongues was common, "was left to struggle with the difficulties of a barbarous dialect." The objection is urged, more openly, in the Free Enquiry (p. 119) and is founded on an utter misrepresentation of the passage in Irenæus. (Præf. adv. Hær. I. 1. 2.) Far from acknowledging either the want of the language of Gaul, or any *difficulties* respecting it, Irenæus apologizes only for his want of eloquence, of the knowledge of composition, and of the ornaments of style, in his writings, from his residence among the Celtæ, and his being for the most part used to a *barbarous* dialect. It should be observed, that our author does not refer to the passage itself, in Irenæus, for the support of his assertion

repugnant to that natural duty, which obliges us to employ our faculties, in the discovery of truth. When important passages are misrepresented, when the characters of venerable writers are sacrificed to false criticism, neither the diligence of an impartial inquirer, the discernment of a scholar, nor the fidelity of an historian, are discoverable.

I have now only to address myself, for the last time, more immediately to you. Did not I know, your regard for truth, above all, for religious truth, I might think, I owed you an apology for having so long detained you, with researches far more important, than amusing. The plan I have followed, neither admitted, nor required, the pleasing ornaments of style. To contend with an ingenious writer, step by step, is a painful employment, even to him that undertakes it. But it was necessary, and it might prove

on, but introduces only in his note, (as on many other occasions) a *new* remark. (Note 72. p. lxx.) Had he either examined the passage itself, or attended fairly to both sides of the question, by reading the answers to Dr. Middleton's work, he could not have fallen into so gross a mistake.

prove useful, to expose fallacious reasoning, to detect insufficient proofs, and to point out the suppression of material evidence. If it should be thought, that I have been in any degree, useful in an important cause, I shall have succeeded to the utmost of my wishes.

I cannot however conclude, without lamenting, the hard fate of those, who from sincere conviction, think it incumbent on them to oppose the attacks of infidelity. The enemies of religion assume at pleasure, a variety of shapes; and they scruple not to repeat the most partial objections, nay to collect them studiously, under the delusive appearance of novelty.

The apologist of religion, can adopt but one mode of defence; conclusive indeed, and satisfactory to those who search patiently after truth, but simple and unadorned, and destitute of the charms, either of variety or novelty, for those who seek only to be amused. He is obliged sometimes to repeat the observations of others; and he may to some perhaps, seem altogether to
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insist on obvious and well-known truths. It is too often forgotten, that repeated attacks require repeated answers; and that the cause of religion is too sacred and important, not to lay claim to continual defence. Not to be ready to oppose the enemy, as often as he returns to the charge, would be in some sort to abandon the field, and to acknowledge tacitly, the superiority of his forces.

One comfort, however, remains to the apologist of religion, amidst every disadvantage arising from the conduct of its adversaries; amidst the use of those arts which he disdains to imitate, and of those indirect censures, which it is difficult to refute. He cannot but be conscious to himself, that he endeavours to defend those truths, which are of the highest importance to mankind.

I am, &c,

